

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks Prior to a Roundtable Discussion on Civil Society in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

November 21, 2015

Well, this is a great opportunity for me to meet with some outstanding, courageous men and women who represent civil society organizations here in Malaysia. And as many of you who have accompanied me on foreign trips know, one of the things that I like to do, in addition to meeting with leaders of government, is also to meet with civil society leaders and hear from them directly about the kinds of issues and challenges that they are facing.

The United States, as a matter of policy, and my administration, as a matter of policy and values, strongly believes in the promotion of civil society. And we think that when you have a strong civil society, you have a government that is more accountable, and you benefit from the ideas and views of a diverse set of citizens. Strong societies ultimately have strong civil societies.

And Malaysia, as a country that traditionally has a wide range of ethnic groups and religious faiths and a tradition of tolerance, very much benefits from the multiplicity of voices that need to be heard. This is also a country that has a Constitution and is premised on the rule of law. And many of these civil society groups, I think, are concerned about any constrictions on civil liberties and civil rights and also in expanding the boundaries of civil society so that people here in Malaysia and around the region are able to have their voices heard.

So we very much appreciate the work that they do. Part of the reason that I want to meet with them is to send a clear message that the United States stands behind the important work that they're doing on a day-to-day basis. And in my conversations with ASEAN leaders, as is true with leaders around the globe, we'll continue to emphasize our belief that basic universal values like freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly—that these are all things that will make countries stronger. And given the extraordinary development and progress that Malaysia has made, this is certainly a case in point.

So I very much thank you all for taking the time to meet with me, and I look forward to hearing directly from you.

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. at the Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur hotel.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia :: Civil society roundtable discussion.

Locations: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

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